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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 114494

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: CASC AMED AMGT TBIO KFLU SARB

SUBJECT: TRAVEL ALERT - THE HAJJ

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¶1. The Department of State alerts U.S. citizens to the latest information on the 2009-H1N1 influenza (also referred to as novel H1N1 or swine flu) pandemic and preparations for the Hajj. Although most people who have become ill with 2009-H1N1 influenza have recovered without requiring medical treatment, young children and people with certain predisposing conditions such as pregnancy or asthma are at increased risk of severe morbidity and mortality. The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has issued guidelines for potential travelers for the upcoming Hajj, which begins in late November 2009. This Travel Alert expires on December 15.

¶2. The recent worldwide H1N1 pandemic, combined with the Southern Hemisphere's regular influenza season, may impact this year's annual Hajj pilgrimage (which is to begin in late November 2009), when approximately three million Muslim pilgrims from all over the world will gather in Saudi Arabia.

¶3. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued recommendations for travelers on the Hajj. (<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/content/id/2434.aspx>). For influenza, these recommendations include:
-- routine vaccination against the seasonal influenza at least 2 weeks before traveling;
-- vaccination against influenza A (H1N1) 2009 (when available and traveler is at high risk for flu complications);
-- vaccination for meningococcal disease (quadrivalent). The CDC recommends the following vaccinations as well:
o Routine vaccinations (such as MMR, tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis)
o Polio
o Hepatitis A
o Hepatitis B
o Typhoid

For more information on general health issues when traveling to Saudi Arabia during the Hajj and Umrah,

please see the CDC's website at:
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/content/id/2434.a.spx>

¶ 14. The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is actively preparing to meet this public health challenge by implementing a number of measures, including increased health screening at ports of entry and increased capacity of temporary quarantine facilities.

¶ 15. U.S. travelers also should be aware of these additional guidelines from the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:

-- Pilgrims who decide to travel to Saudi Arabia are advised to receive seasonal influenza vaccine at least two weeks before they travel to Mecca and Medina.
-- To limit the spread of 2009 H1N1 flu and to reduce the risk of flu exposure for people at increased risk of flu complications, pilgrims should be at least 12 years old and not over 65 years of age.

-- Pilgrims should refrain from performing Umrah or the Hajj if they have chronic diseases such as heart, liver, or kidney diseases, complications of diabetes, obesity, or any other diseases or conditions that affect a person's overall health and immunity.

-- Pilgrims should be vaccinated against the 2009 influenza A (H1N1) vaccine when it becomes available.

¶ 16. For more information on how to prepare for a severe pandemic, please see the State Department's "Pandemic Influenza Fact Sheet" and "Options During a Pandemic"

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flyer located on www.travel.state.gov. Detailed information about 2009-H1N1 influenza can be found on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>, the U.S. Government influenza website at <http://www.flu.gov>, and the World Health Organization website at <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>.

¶ 17. U.S. citizens are strongly encouraged to register with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate through the Department of State's travel registration website at <http://travel.state.gov>. By registering, American citizens can receive the Embassy's most recent security and safety updates during their trips. Registration also ensures that U.S. citizens can be reached should an emergency arise either abroad or at home. While consular officers will do their utmost to assist Americans in a crisis, travelers always should be aware that local authorities bear primary responsibility for the welfare of people living or traveling in their jurisdictions.

¶ 18. The Department of State shares credible threat information through its Consular Information Program documents, available on the Internet at <http://travel.state.gov>. In addition to information on the Internet, travelers may obtain up-to-date information on security conditions by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the United States and Canada or, for callers outside the United States and Canada, a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

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